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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2039
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000209

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/04/2020
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [UN](#) [TU](#) [AORC](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY: USMISSION GENEVA CONSULTATIONS ON
DEFAMATION OF RELIGIONS

REF: GENEVA 94

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady for reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. USMission Geneva Charge d'Affaires Griffiths and Deputy Legal Adviser Mansfield visited Ankara February 1 to discuss the defamation of religions resolution and draft treaty being planned by the OIC in the UN Human Rights Council. They met with Turkey's Ambassador for Human Rights Binnur Fertekligil, and the Directorate of Religious Affairs Head of the Foreign Relations Department, Ali Dere, both of whom supported the proposed U.S. Action Plan while emphasizing the importance of differentiating between freedom of expression and respect for religions. Ambassador Jeffrey recommended the Spanish Government be asked to press Turkey for support on this issue as well. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) At the MFA, Ambassador for Human Rights Binnur Fertekligil stressed that the Islamic world is particularly sensitive about the defamation of religion topic since there has been an unfortunate trend associating Islam with violence and terrorism, especially since the events of September 11. Fertekligil said it is important to be open with OIC countries about the likely negative political outcomes of a treaty on defamation of religions. She emphasized that first and foremost, the U.S. and EU countries should acknowledge the sensitivities of OIC countries on this issue, while explaining to the Islamic world that individuals -- not religions -- are the holders of human rights. She said freedom of expression is a must, but freedom of expression should not make people feel rejected or insulted, and should not create a hostile environment because that can lead to violence. Fertekligil opined that freedom of expression in the EU includes some exceptions/restrictions, and is therefore different from how it is viewed in the U.S. She added that it would be useful to have a written text that would set out how to uphold the freedoms of religion and expression with the notion that people nonetheless have responsibilities in exercising their freedom of speech. She mentioned hate speech as a good basis from which to make those distinctions.

13. (SBU) Fertekligil noted that governments also need to work hard to bring their citizens back to the mainstream when the sensitive line between freedom of expression and insulting religions is crossed. If not, she said, governments create "fault lines" of division. Within this context, the Alliance of Civilizations is very important for Turkey. It is constructive and positive, and unifies states rather than dividing them. Seeking tolerance, harmony, and greater mutual understanding are the foundational goals of the Alliance. Turkey is ready to help the U.S., she said. It supports the U.S. action plan, and will seek a broader consensus on this issue in order to successfully implement the plan.

14. (SBU) In a separate meeting, Ali Dere, the Head of the Foreign Relations Department at the Directorate of Religious

Affairs (Diyanet) told Griffiths and Mansfield that freedom of expression is also an important topic for Turkey. However, people in Europe need to be more responsible and not cross the line between freedom of expression and insulting religions. He stated that Muslim communities in Europe feel oppressed due to recent events like the minaret ban in Switzerland. He suggested that, perhaps, freedom of expression is not perceived as a two-way street in Europe. Dere stressed that the Diyanet will support the U.S. action plan, and will support initiating a constructive dialogue about this sensitive issue. However, he reiterated, all governments need to consider Muslim communities' concerns while discussing these regulations and treaties.

15. (C) COMMENT: As Ambassador Jeffrey indicated to the USMission Geneva delegation, although the Turkish MFA and Diyanet support this topic, they do not represent the opinions of Turkey's head of government. Still, PM Erdogan is a vigorous advocate for the Alliance of Civilizations, and Spain and Turkey have worked closely together on issues of Christianity and Islam. Given the strong personal relationship between Spanish President Zapatero and PM Erdogan, Washington should consider asking Spain to contact Turkish officials to deliver the same message about opposing the defamation of religion resolution and treaty during the March meeting. If Turkey were to vote against the defamation resolutions, it would have a significant impact on other OIC countries.

16. (U) USMission Geneva has cleared this cable.
Jeffrey

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